

FLORIDA.—REPAIR FORT MARION, &c.

JANUARY 24, 1833.

Laid before the House by the Delegate from the Territory of Florida, and referred to the Committee on Military Affairs.

Copy of a letter from a distinguished gentleman of St. Augustine, to the Delegate from Florida.

TALLAHASSEE, January 8th, 1833.

SIR: I am sorry it has not been in my power, owing to the pressure of official engagements, to write you before now, upon the subject of the public improvements which are necessary and proper at St. Augustine.

No one can see the *castle* or *fort*, as it is called, completed by the Spanish Government in 1745, without *admiration* and *regret*. It is allowed, as you know, by military men, to have been constructed according to the best principles of fortification, and it long afforded protection to an otherwise almost defenceless position; now going rapidly to ruin, its walls, at one or two points, are falling into the sea. When it passed into the hands of the United States it was in good repair, and the money expended upon the *barracks* in the same city (formerly an old monastery) might, if appropriated to this important work, not only have preserved a fine and venerable monument of art, but made it a commodious residence for soldiery, and an impregnable fortress. At present it is used as a *jail* and a *magazine*; for the latter it is not well suited, because *neglect* and *time* have rendered the roof and walls, in many places, pervious to moisture, and besides, *it is near half a mile from the garrison*. Apart from other considerations, *this post would be most important in the event of SERVILE INSURRECTION*, a contingency which, in a slave-holding country, we are always obliged to hold in consideration. If *panic*, such as occurred not long ago in Georgia and other southern States, should, unhappily, be spread abroad, either with or without cause, *Fort Marion*, in good repair, would afford a safe asylum to women and children; indeed, it would impart a sense of strength and security to all East Florida. If the work be worthy of repair, as it seems to me it certainly is, every day's delay will but increase the labor and expense of repairing: what *is* to be done, should speedily be accomplished; for the time has come when a general dilapidation can only be checked by a strong and prompt effort. It may be added, that the preservation of this great work (which cost so much originally that, when the accounts were presented to the Spanish king, he asked if the walls were made of *silver*), is perhaps due to the *feelings* of the community, of which it was once the pride and boast. There is no native inhabitant who speaks of its present ruinous condition, without contrasting it with the favor and attention bestowed for-

merly upon it by the Spanish Government, and expressing a lively regret *at the change*. If this castle were again devoted to military purposes, and the present barracks (which I do not venture to hope for, and scarcely persuade myself to suggest) converted *into a public seminary*, the advantages accruing to St. Augustine would be very great. That city has now to depend for its prosperity *upon the salubrity of its climate*, which invites those who wish for, and prize health, to reside there, and fits it in a *peculiar manner for a seat of learning*.

In former times there was a *sea-wall* running along the water's edge from the castle to the southern extremity of the city, protecting the inhabitants and their property from the encroachments of the waters, which, driven by the tides and winds, often threatened both. A part of this wall has been removed by the United States, for the purpose of making a wharf opposite to the barracks; and this breach, and others occasioned by the constant action of the sea, expose the city to gradual, but certain and great injury. Since I have been in St. Augustine the sea has made its way to the doors of several houses, literally *imprisoning* the inhabitants, and dashing the spray into the very windows. Unless arrested by a permanent wall, such as the Spaniards erected, there will, at some time or other, and perhaps at no distant period, be a loss of life and property, *particularly distressing to the Government, because a considerable portion of the wall standing at the change of flags was removed by its agents*.

I am not able to speak with any thing like accuracy of the amount necessary for these repairs; it would doubtless be considerable; but could the members of Congress be transported to the spot, ample appropriations would not be for a moment withheld. I have imparted not my own opinions only, but those of the inhabitants of East Florida, of every intelligent stranger with whom I have conversed, and of several gentlemen of the army; all agree that the sea wall should be thoroughly repaired, and so should Fort Marion, even though the present barracks continue to be appropriated, as now, to the use of the military. *Feeling and safety alike demand these improvements.*

FORT MARION, ST. AUGUSTINE, (FLORIDA,)

9th January, 1833.

SIR: I have been requested by Judge R. R. Reed, and a number of gentlemen of the city of St. Augustine and its vicinity, to send you the enclosed estimate of the amount and cost of the materials required to repair Fort Marion and the tide-wall for the protection of the city of St. Augustine, which I hope will be of some service to you in obtaining an appropriation for so desirable an object.

I am, sir, very respectfully,

Your obedient servant,

G. S. DRANE,

Capt. 2d Art'y.

To the Hon. J. L. WHITE,

Delegate from Florida, Washington City, D. C.

ESTIMATE of the quantity, kind, and cost of the building materials delivered at St. Augustine, necessary for the repairs of Fort Marion and the Tide-Wall, for the protection of the city of St. Augustine, East Florida.

		Dollars.	Cts.
1,200	One thousand and two hundred squares of stone, a \$8 per square	9,600	00
6,000	Six thousand bushels shell lime, a 12½ cents per bushel	750	00
16,000	Sixteen thousand bushels sand, a 3 cents per bushel	300	00
10,000	Ten thousand feet 1½ inch plank, a \$20 per thousand	2,000	00
10,000	Ten thousand feet scantling, a \$18 per thousand	1,800	00
5,000	Five thousand feet 1½ inch plank, a \$20 per thousand	1,000	00
15,000	Fifteen thousand brick, a \$16 per thousand	2,430	00
2	Two large flat boats	450	00
	Contingent expenses	800	00
		<u>\$19,130</u>	<u>00</u>

Note.—Mechanics can be employed from \$1 50 to \$2 per day, and laborers at \$12 per month.

Extracts from the presentments of the grand jury returned at the November term, 1832, of the Superior Court for East Florida. Copied and certified to the honorable the delegate from this Territory, in the Congress of the United States, by order of the court.

Finally, the grand jury would press the particular attention of the delegate in Congress to a few facts, that he may be the better enabled to aid the inhabitants of this section of the country to provide for their present and immediate welfare.

They consider the jail wholly unfit for its purpose, it being damp, unsafe, and incommodious.

They repeat the call for an appropriation to cut the United States' mail route as far as Palatea.

They would suggest that the Government be informed of the necessity of reclosing the public trench in the northern part of the city; the several ponds adjacent; and, in particular, one a little distant from Dragoon Barrack lot, so that they may redound to the health and comfort of the inhabitants.

The roads from Jacksonville to St. Augustine, and thence to Tomoka, are in a bad condition, being almost impassable from fallen trees, and otherwise rendered dangerous from broken and decayed bridges.

A canal from Halifax river to Matanzas is every day more needed and

looked for; and, in the opinion of the grand jury, the facilities for its accomplishment can be only equalled by its necessity. The canals from the North river to Pable creek, and from Six Mile creek to the St. Sebastian, as lately surveyed, are well worthy of consideration.

The want of a sea-wall to protect the city of St. Augustine is coming to be painfully felt: the inhabitants, with their little means, are wholly incapable of arresting the progress of the waters; so, that without some aid, they have cause to fear, at no distant period of time, a melancholy loss of property and life.

The grand jury recommend a bill to be submitted to the General Government, on the national importance of putting a few repairs on the fort at St. Augustine. It is impossible that any true Floridian can behold the present state of that model of fortification without regret, when even the stranger looks but to admire and sympathize in its decay. The watch-towers of Fort Marion are broken; every day brings the fissures of its terraces more asunder; its outworks are leaning and tottering to the sea; while the night-bird, as she sits in the cranny of its ruins, alone seems happy in the desolation.

A true copy.

Attest:

GEORGE GIBBS, *Clerk.*

Pr. B. GIBBS, *Dep. Clerk.*